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Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 48/109 of 20 December 1993, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas and to submit it, through the Economic and Social Council, to the Assembly at its fiftieth session. Reports on the subject have been submitted to the Assembly in 1985 (A/40/239 and Add.1), 1989 (A/44/516) and 1993 (A/48/187-E/1993/76).

2. The issue of rural women has been on the international agenda for a long time. It has been addressed in various conferences and agreements, as reflected in the final documents of the three World Conferences on Women, in 1975, 1980 and 1985, the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, in 1979, the World Summit for Children, in 1990, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Conference on Population and Development, in 1994, and the World Summit for Social Development, in 1995. It was considered at the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, organized in 1992 under the auspices of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Issues related to rural women can be found throughout the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. 1/ Considerable information has thus been collected, analysed and presented over the past two decades about the situation of women in rural areas.

3. The report requested by the General Assembly seeks to update that information, taking into account a number of new and emerging perspectives on the issue. Over the past decade, there has been no radical change in the issues relating to rural women and the types of actions necessary to address them. In policy terms, there is a general consensus about what should be done, as expressed in the reports of international conferences and the resolutions adopted by intergovernmental bodies and expert seminars and meetings. These include:

(a) Access to land, capital/credit, technology;

(b) Access to gainful employment;

(c) Support for non-agricultural activities;

(d) Access to markets;

(e) At least a minimum level of social infrastructure;

(f) Availability of basic health and family planning services;

(g) Access to education, including adult education, aimed at eliminating illiteracy;

(h) Access to water, electricity, energy resources;

(i) Social support measures, e.g., child-care facilities and social security;

(j) Access to decision-making at all levels;

(k) Empowerment of women;

(l) Community organization and training.

4. These affirmations have been made in various ways over the past 20 years. There is considerable evidence that, as is the case with the global economy as a whole and with developing countries in general, rural societies are beginning to undergo fundamental changes.

5. Demographic projections now suggest that around the year 2006, half of the world's population will be living in urban areas and the proportion of women living in rural areas will continue to decline globally as it has in some regions already.

6. The importance of rural women in the next century will rest more on their impact on the economy and society than on their numbers. It will be related to their contribution to food security and to economic growth, as well as to the maintenance of social cohesion.

7. Taking into account previous analyses, the report seeks to examine the trends that will affect the status of rural women in the twenty-first century. The analysis centres on the changes in the world in terms of the patterns of growth in the global economy, urbanization and environmental degradation. It then examines two issues that are of growing, but somewhat unrecognized importance, for rural women: food security and the impact of rural-urban migration.

II. TRENDS AND ISSUES AFFECTING RURAL WOMEN

8. Rural women the world over are an integral and vital force in the development processes that are the key to socio-economic progress. Rural women include farmers, as well as domestic servants. They form the backbone of the agricultural labour force across much of the developing world and produce an estimated 35 to 45 per cent of the gross domestic product and well over half of the developing world's food. Yet, more than half a billion rural women are poor and lack access to resources and markets. In fact, their number is estimated to have increased by 50 per cent over the past 20 years and, at the present time, they outnumber poor men.

9. The situation of rural women is beginning to be affected by the growing interdependence of the global economy, by urbanization and by the increasing concern with food security.

A. Changes in the global economy

10. As has been shown in the 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2/ and in the second review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, changes in the global economy have had a noticeable gender dimension. There has been recovery in some parts of the developing world, but stagnation in others. The interdependence of national economies has continued to grow. These changes have particular effects on rural women, depending on where they live.

11. In a separate study, on the effective mobilization and integration of women in development (A/50/399), it is noted that one consequence of economic change is the extensive incorporation of women into the economically active population, especially in the sectors showing the greatest growth. These growth sectors are non-agricultural.

12. Traditionally, the role of agriculture in economic development has been viewed as that of establishing a framework for industrialization by providing factor inputs and low-priced food. Disillusion in the 1980s with industrialization-at-any-cost development strategies that were extremely costly in terms of imports and other scarce resources brought about renewed interest in agriculture, but as a vehicle for economic growth and productive employment.

13. More than three quarters of the population of developing countries depend directly on agriculture for their livelihood. Agricultural development is therefore the sine qua non of national economic development if economic progress is to reach the majority of the population without a long wait for "trickle-down" effects. Agriculture is also important in the sense that its failure to keep pace with industrialization can act as a constraint on sustainable industrial growth and the development of other sectors, because it constitutes an important source of effective demand for industry.

14. The neglect of agriculture, a by-product of decades of inward-oriented industrialization in developing countries, has been a cause of severe internal imbalances and widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment. Policies of overvalued exchange rates, high effective protection and repressed financial markets have had a negative effect on agricultural growth. However, the process of redressing the bias against agriculture created by such policies has sometimes led to a worsening of the gender bias in agricultural economic activity, because of the absence of gender awareness in economic adjustment policies. Failure to take account of gender barriers to the intra- and inter-sectoral reallocation of resources in the design of adjustment policies so as to correct their adverse effects on gender balance in access to and command of productive resources has led to a shift in relative income-earning ability in agricultural production in favour of men, albeit with some regional variations. Persistent inadequacies in women's access to land, credit, extension services and technology suggest that men rather than women have been able to benefit from incentives under expanded commercial agriculture. Women own-account farmers, agricultural labourers and subsistence producers have largely remained in low-productivity and low-income activities.

B. Urbanization

15. A significant factor in the future of rural development is the accelerating trend towards urbanization. Whether through rural-urban migration or the growth of smaller towns to sizes that will define them as urban, according to United Nations projections, the urbanization process will result in 62 per cent of the population living in urban areas within 30 years (see table 1).

Table 1. Total world population and percentage of population residing in urban areas

Region	1970		1995		2025	
	Total population (in thousands)	Percent urban	Total population (in thousands)	Percent urban	Total population (in thousands)	Percent urban
World total	3 697 141	36.59	5 716 426	45.21	8 294 341	61.07
More developed regions	1 002 607	67.52	1 166 598	74.92	1 238 406	83.98
Less developed regions	2 694 535	25.08	4 549 828	37.59	7 055 935	57.05
Least developed countries	302 737	12.62	575 407	22.40	1 162 279	43.49

Source: World Urbanization Prospects: The 1994 Revision (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.12), tables A.3 and A.5.

16. At the same time, even as its relative proportion declines, the total rural population in the world is projected to continue to grow larger, at least until 2025, when it begins to decline slowly (see table 2). As is the case today, most of the rural dwellers will be in developing countries. However, their number will be dwarfed by the 5 billion urban residents in 2025, 4 billion of whom will be in the less developed regions. This will amount to an increase of 2.6 billion people from 1995, all of whom will have to be fed through increased agricultural productivity.

Table 2 Rural population and average annual rate of change of rural population in the world, 1965-1970, 1985-1990 and 2020-2025

Region	Rural population (in thousands)			Rate of change		
	1970	1990	2025	1965-1970	1985-1990	2020-2025
World total	2 344 356	3 007 383	3 229 007	1.71	1.06	-0.37
Less developed regions	2 018 685	2 705 976	3 030 649	2.18	1.22	-0.28
More developed regions	325 671	301 407	198 357	-0.96	-0.28	-1.63

Source: World Urbanization Prospects: The 1994 Revision (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.12), table 18.

17. Urban growth occurs both because of natural growth in urban populations and because of rural-urban migration. In the early stages, migration is the dominant factor. Migration is not gender neutral and it is the gender difference in migration that can strongly affect the situation of rural women in a given country.

18. There is growing evidence that in low-growth areas, it is men who migrate, while in high-growth areas, women migrate at a higher rate, particularly younger women. This can be seen in table 3, which shows the ratio of women to men in urban and rural areas among the young adult cohorts. 3/ In regions that have experienced greater and more rapid economic growth, it appears that post-school-age women migrate at a greater rate than men. In countries that have had less growth, it is young men who have been more likely to migrate.

19. The patterns of rural-to-urban migration observed in each of these regions are consistent with regional trends in economic development with respect to trade orientation, the inflow of foreign direct investment and the type of employment in export-processing industries. The creation of export-processing zones in the context of export-promotion policies has undoubtedly contributed to fostering female migration from rural to urban areas in the first and second generation of the newly industrialized economies of East and South-East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

20. Migration has effects on the rural economy generally and on gender relations which need to be examined. On the one hand, male migration can undercut agriculture when food production is affected by traditional sex-based divisions of labour and when women lack access to credit, technology and markets. On the other hand, female migration can erode traditional systems as migrants take on new urban values, institutions such as the extended family become less effective because of physical distance and kin-based obligations become less important. At the same time, remittances from migrants can become a significant part of the rural economy.

Table 3. Ratio of women to men in total, urban and rural population (1990 census round)

(Number of women for each 100 men)

Region	Age group	Total population	Urban population	Rural population
Africa	15-19	99.7	98.9	110.0
	20-24	100.2	88.5	109.7
Latin America	15-19	98.4	106.1	87.3
	20-24	100.6	108.9	88.2
Western Europe	15-19	95.6	97.2	91.3
	20-24	95.6	98.8	86.5
Asia and Pacific	15-19	94.6	93.0	96.3
	20-24	94.4	90.9	96.9
East Asia	15-19	93.8	93.6	93.8
	20-24	93.5	95.6	86.4
South-East Asia	15-19	96.8	98.7	96.8
	20-24	98.6	100.3	98.2
Eastern Europe	15-19	94.8	93.9	93.4
	20-24	95.2	95.8	92.9

Source: Women's Indicators and Statistics Database (WISTAT), version 3, 1994.

C. Food security

21. The transformation of societies towards an urban base provides opportunities as well as problems. The strategic role of rural areas in the production of food becomes more important as urban populations increase in size, and food production can be a source of economic growth, since an increasing share of production will have to be marketed rather than self-consumed. Moreover, the increase in cash income of the rural population can provide a stimulus for the urban economy through increases in consumption of basic goods. Owing to the fact that, in a large number of the developing countries, women predominate in food production and marketing, this should provide enhanced opportunities for rural women.

22. All development strategies include concerns about food, agriculture and population. These three factors constitute the concept of sustainable food security. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines food security to mean "that food is available at all times, that all persons have means of access to it, that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety, and that it is acceptable within the given culture". 4/

23. Trends in per capita food production and food supplies in the present decade are similar to a large extent to the trends in per capita output, which is similar to the situation a decade ago. During the past three decades, the number of countries that were able to meet their daily per capita requirements has increased from fewer than 25 to more than 50. The rate of agricultural production growth at the global level has been about 2.3 per cent between 1970 and 1990 and thus has exceeded population growth so that per capita supplies of food have increased. However, wide regional disparities remained: the situation improved in East Asia but worsened in sub-Saharan Africa and there was no progress in Latin America. 5/

24. The International Conference on Nutrition, held in December 1992, drew attention to the fact that more than 780 million people, or 20 per cent of the population in developing countries, suffer from chronic malnutrition and each year about 13 million children below the age of five die from infectious diseases that can be attributed to hunger or malnutrition.

25. Any approach to food security needs to take into account the role of rural women, their status and opportunities regarding all these issues. Although rural women are at the end of the distribution chain for productive resources and social services, they are at the beginning of the food production chain. In developing countries rural women are responsible for more than 55 per cent of the food grown; in Africa they produce 70 per cent of the food. Moreover, women comprise 67 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. 6/

III. MAJOR FACTORS IN RURAL WOMEN'S ROLE AS FOOD PRODUCERS

26. One of the major findings over the past 20 years has been that, in most developing countries, women are the predominant producers of food for domestic consumption. They perform this function while facing considerable constraints. An examination of these factors can provide a basis for determining how best to overcome the constraints and thereby help increase the effectiveness of women in addressing the issue of food security.

27. In contrast to more developed countries, where growth in agricultural production has been based on application of technology and increased size of productive units, food production in developing countries remains centred on smaller holdings managed by households that provide the bulk of the labour input required by the productive systems.

28. There are a number of gender dimensions to food production, relating to labour input, to land use, to access to capital and technology and to environmentally sound production practices. These four factors are linked and, if addressed, can help ensure that food production increases with accompanying benefits for rural households and for society as a whole.

A. Labour availability and use

29. Food production in developing countries is labour-intensive. For households, ensuring that there will be family members available to do necessary work is an essential economic element. Women and men alike provide labour input, although their tasks often differ. There is a close relationship between having children and agricultural production, and having large numbers of children is often perceived by women and men alike as an economic necessity. As one analyst noted, there is a certain paradox, with the increase of women's responsibilities and duties, higher demand on their time and energy, they are "less likely to see the utility for themselves of having fewer children, even though population densities in the little land left for subsistence families are rapidly increasing". 7/ There are now seen to be a number of incentives for rural women to have larger numbers of children, with the consequent impact on their abilities to increase production.

30. While there is a correlation between the decline of fertility and increases in income, at least to a certain level, there is an underlying assumption that higher income encourages people to invest in hired labour or mechanization and thereby release children and pay more attention to their education. However, a number of studies indicate that men and women invest increased incomes differently and men were not necessarily willing to hire labour to replace that of their spouses and children. Others indicate that rural women may perceive the need to have many children, especially sons, as long-term risk insurance, as widows are able to keep their property largely through sons' productive activity and status.

31. The strong motivation of rural women in developing countries to have more children is also related to infant mortality. To reduce fertility, it is

necessary to ensure the survival of children through improvement of maternal and child nutrition, availability of health care and clean water. This, in turn, is related to increases in income. Increases in income involve improved nutrition and application of labour-saving technologies, although that depends on whether the increases in income are passed on as greater food entitlements for the family, particularly to the more nutritionally vulnerable members, and as investment in higher labour productivity, again in particular to the most work-stressed members.

B. Intra-household relations

32. To a larger extent than in urban areas, the rural household is a production unit as well as one whose primary economic function is the management of consumption. Women, men and children in the household are expected to contribute to household income, by working the household's land, by working as salaried labour and by other means. The effectiveness of the household as an economic unit depends in large measure on the intra-household relations between women and men. As Waring noted in 1988: "Family resources and decisions impinge not only on rates of fertility, mortality, and migration, but also on transfer of activities from the unpaid, largely unmeasured household sector to the market sector, which is a fundamental determinant of the rate of growth of gross national product". 8/

33. Most households have a division of labour based on gender. The precise division of tasks varies by country and culture, although a common feature is that women are given primary responsibility for the tasks associated with preparing food, providing fuel and water, raising children and taking care of the elderly and the sick. They frequently have the responsibility for subsistence production of food, as well as for certain tasks in commercial production.

34. While the economics of subsistence agriculture has begun to be studied, the gender dimensions of household production are less known. There is evidence from micro-studies that an examination of intra-household gender differences in food production would show that women make a significant contribution to the household economy and, by aggregation, to national food security. However, the extent of this contribution has not yet been generally measured.

35. A variety of studies, including national reports prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women, have shown the considerable contribution of women farmers to food production. For example, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as a result of women's rice farming, national rice production was said to have doubled between 1976 and 1985. In Viet Nam, female peasants contributed significantly to changes in the rural economic structure and increased rate of production growth. Food production there went up from 18.4 million tons in 1986 to 21.5 million in 1989, 1990 and 1991, converting Viet Nam from a food importer to a food exporter. In China, the output value produced by women was estimated to account for between 50 and 60 per cent of the gross agricultural output value.

36. The migration of men in order to find seasonal work, especially in Latin America and Asia, and the displacement of pastoral households, especially in Africa, in practice, both increase women's role in livestock production and their workload. This role is not recognized at the policy-making level or in legal terms. As a result, the provision of services and external inputs, both technical and financial, bypasses women in all three continents and has not kept up with women's increasing role in livestock production. Government policies continue to encourage male-oriented activities, namely, beef production, large commercial dairy centres and large-scale cattle trade. To reach women, focus should be on small-scale activities, e.g., milk-based products, small ruminants and other small stock.

37. An additional gender factor is that women's systematic lack of access to cash can create biases in the perception of who is producing what and earning what within the household. 9/ Women are often not able to exercise rights of ownership and use of resources, including their labour, to the same degree as men. Often, women are not recognized as holders of rights on their own account, but rather are considered, to a lesser or greater degree, dependants of men. In rural areas, women who work in the field, in family productive units and in a work-paid system, paid by job or by production, are generally seen as helpers of their husbands.

38. The growing number of female-headed households in developing countries represents a challenge for improving household food security. In general, female-headed households tend to be poorer, own less land, and often lack access to credit and technology. However, according to studies undertaken in Kenya and Malawi, household food security and the nutritional status of individual members can be significantly better in female-headed households, as women tend to spend a greater proportion of their income on food. One of the study's conclusions was that, although there is a strong argument that income is a major determinant of household food security, it is also true that the level of income controlled by women has a positive impact on household caloric intake, an impact that is over and above the effect of income. This finding suggests that gender may influence the composition of diets within households, as was indicated in the Malawi case by the higher proportion of food budgets allocated to alcoholic beverages by male-headed households and the higher proportion of calories directed to young children by the poorer de facto female-headed households. In other terms, the female gender of the head compensates for the difference in income at low levels of income. Clearly, it is not the female-headedness *per se* that leads to this pattern of behaviour, but the intersection between income and gender of the head. 10/

39. In its study on the state of world rural poverty, IFAD concluded that since the food security of households is usually dependent on women's earnings, low-paying jobs and lack of regular employment for women often mean inadequate food security and poor family nutrition. Support for rural women should focus on generating off-farm and on-farm regular employment and on improving wage incomes. Improving technical skills of women through better education and training also improves their access to better jobs. 11/

40. When intra-household relations are asymmetric, in terms of ability to contribute to or benefit from economic activity, the household may not be able to manage its resources efficiently, particularly when women's skills are not used effectively. This is often attributable to cultural factors which, for example, can preclude women from decision-making on land use or from marketing activities.

41. Intra-household relations are crucial for policy design and implementation, and further examination of this factor, particularly in terms of women's role as the main producers of food, will be necessary.

C. Land distribution and income

42. Of all of the factors that determine food production, access to land is the most important. Women's lesser access to land has been a common factor in most societies and still constitutes one of the main obstacles to their full participation in rural development. The existing practices, including of inheritance, favour male ownership of land. Even in those countries where women are legally entitled to own land, de facto implementation of this right is rare. Indeed, the issue of access to land was a major concern reflected in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

43. Of particular importance to rural women is the development of legal measures and administrative regulations to improve their secure access to land. This may involve designating women as individual or joint owners of plots distributed in agrarian reforms, giving them separate tenancy rights in settlement schemes, improving their rights to claim a fair share of family resources upon divorce, abandonment or widowhood, and so forth. A second area of concern is the review of civil codes that treat women as legal minors, requiring, for example, their husband's signature to open bank accounts or to obtain credit. Equally important for rural women, especially in Asia and Latin America, is new labour legislation supporting their equitable access to rural labour markets, mandating equal pay for equal work, and improving working conditions, while enforcing legal standards. A fourth priority is to improve rural women's access to informal sector markets by eliminating discriminatory licensing and price-control measures.

44. When they are automatically designated as heads of household men can control most household economic resources and are normally indirect recipients of project resources targeted at households. These principles hold even when men are not the primary source of household income and when women manage important household resources and conduct various household enterprises on a relatively autonomous basis. In most societies, there is still male control of land, major livestock resources, a large share of subsistence output and the bulk of household income. Women are, in general, dependent on men for final decisions with respect to virtually everything that affects their lives, and are therefore more vulnerable to poverty.

45. Rural women's customary land rights have also been threatened by agrarian reform programmes which have tended to redistribute land titles primarily to

men. Although all the land reform legislation of Asia brought the land to the beneficiary "household" or "family", it allowed the allocation of land within the household to be governed by prevailing custom and law, which decreed the man to be the "head of the household". Land was allotted to the "tenant" or "tiller", who was always presumed to be a man. Thus, although the agrarian reform legislation during the period 1945-1985 did not specifically or explicitly discriminate against women, the application of the law in the context of existing customs and inheritance laws often resulted in their losing their right to land.

46. A review of Latin American agrarian reform shows that in all countries, except Cuba and Nicaragua, only one member of the household can officially be designated as a beneficiary. Even though female heads of households may, in principle, apply for land, administrative practices and additional criteria defining potential beneficiaries have essentially excluded women. More recently, a review of 165 national reports submitted to the United Nations Secretariat in 1994 during the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women gave a clear picture of the situation in that area. The existing male preference in ownership of land is found in all regions of the world.

47. Often there are no legal provisions for women to keep the land in case of death of the husband, separation or divorce. The difficulties that rural women encounter in obtaining access to land are even greater for female-headed households, whose number is growing. When women do not own land they often cannot qualify for agricultural services, in particular for credit and extension services, where ownership is a requirement.

48. Market incentives can work in developing countries but only if due consideration is given to the social and legal framework. Where the distribution of land ownership and opportunities is highly skewed towards men, market mechanisms tend to bring more benefits to them, at least in the short run.

D. Protection and regeneration of the resource base

49. There is a pronounced and obvious connection between food security and environmental degradation. The drive towards food security sometimes overtaxes the environment, and environmental degradation often limits the capacity to produce enough food. Various studies have shown that there has been increasing reduction of arable land through soil degradation, erosion, deforestation and desertification. This factor, if unchecked, can affect future abilities to maintain food security.

50. An important link between women and the environment is in terms of the above factor. In most developing countries, food production is undertaken mainly by women, and therefore, issues related to food security, land rights and environmentally sustainable land-use practices are central to their lives. Gender imbalances in access to resources impact negatively on women's ability to play vital custodial roles in sustainable environment practices. There is some evidence that the labour-intensive food production practices of women can be

environmentally sound and could, if used more extensively, both increase food production and protect the resource base. Similarly, it seems likely that women would be particularly receptive to new technologies and techniques that would be beneficial for maintaining land quality.

51. The link between rural women and environmental protection can be seen in terms of forestry. The depletion of forestry resources, in particular, has had a significant negative impact on women. Apart from their value as a productive resource, trees protect the quality of the soil and water and most tropical farming systems are unsustainable without trees as part of the system. Forests provide food, fodder and fibre products which fall within women's responsibility. Small-scale enterprises dependent on forestry products are among the major employers of rural women, particularly the landless and resource poor.

52. Little attention has been given to the asset-creating activities in which women engage, such as through trade involving natural resources and their products, or to the ways in which the use of such resources involves them in the wider social and political life of their families or communities.

53. For example, one analysis has suggested that community forestry projects have frequently assumed women to be interested only in species for fuelwood, in contrast with men's interest in, for example, trees to produce building materials to sell for cash. While women often do have pressing fuel needs, their own responses to narrowly focused fuelwood projects have in many instances revealed the broader scope of their interests and needs. Policies designed from a narrow view of women's roles "risk not only ignoring large parts of their spectrum of interests and activities, but also entrenching women in narrowly defined domestic roles and thus reinforcing, rather than rectifying, gender inequalities". 12/

54. The relationship between women and the environment also includes such issues as their rights of access, control and participation in decision-making over natural resources. The lack of women's rights in that area might demotivate women to invest in sound environmental management and enforce the degradation of the natural resource base.

IV. THE IMPACT OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION ON RURAL WOMEN

55. Gender differences in rural-urban migration has not been well-studied. In part this is because female migration has been neglected as part of a general neglect of women in social sciences research. It also reflects inadequacies in existing data on women's migration, and on women's role and socio-economic status in general. 13/

56. Lack of economic opportunities in rural areas, whether caused by population pressure on finite land resources or lack of non-agricultural development, often leaves younger people little alternative to migration in order to obtain employment. A study prepared by the International Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) noted that the number of female

migrants is increasing world wide. Though more women migrate for family reasons, including to accompany other family members, to get married or to join the spouse, than for economic reasons, a significant proportion of women migrate for economic reasons, including for education, which is usually intended to assist them in seeking better employment in the future. 14/

57. In Asia, for example, in India, Bangladesh and Thailand, men migrate mostly during the slack season, because of underemployment or loss of employment owing to the mechanization of agriculture, for educational purposes, or for psychosocial reasons such as prestige. During the dry season, available non-farm employment opportunities are mainly jobs related to infrastructure, such as construction and maintenance, and they also go to men.

58. There is growing evidence that women also migrate for economic reasons, and not only to join spouses. In Africa, factors such as level of education, age, marital status and ethnicity are associated with migration to the cities. According to studies in eight countries - Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Uganda - it was found that both married and unmarried women had strong motivation to migrate. In every country, except Mali, non-marital reasons for migration appear to be more common in rural-urban migration. In Kenya, small plot holdings in densely populated districts proved unproductive to sustain women on the farms in rural areas. Since 1969, the process of rural-urban migration has progressively shifted from a high dominance of unmarried male migrants to one in which women, both unmarried and married, as well as children, have become an important component of migration.

59. In Asia, women basically fall into two categories: some are forced out of independent rural production for the market into casual labour, while others, generally younger women, are no longer able to make a sufficient contribution to the rural household economy. In the Philippines, for example, 7 out of 10 females employed in the service sector in urban areas are migrants and more than half of these are young and single. 15/ The expansion of the service sector mainly in urban areas of Thailand was the main factor attracting female migrants from the rural areas. Those migrants were relatively less educated, and migrated to Bangkok on a short-term basis to earn supplementary income. The female migrants with higher levels of education had demonstrated considerable independence and moved for economic reasons. In the Republic of Korea, the rate of female migration has slightly exceeded the male rate in the past few decades, with the largest differences occurring between the ages of 15 and 29. Migration rates were associated positively with educational attainment, and the educational selectivity of migration was stronger for females than for males. 16/

60. Major reasons for the out-migration of rural women in Latin America are lack of access to land and mechanization of agricultural production, while, at the same time, there are vast job opportunities for them in the cities, especially in textiles, food processing and other labour-intensive industries, as well as in the informal sector of the economy, such as domestic services or street vending. 17/

61. Male migration to urban areas tends to conserve the traditional kinship relations and patriarchal and seniority values, thus reinforcing gender asymmetries in intra-household distribution and management of productive resources. In general, no significant difference has been found in the number of children of couples who live together and of those in which the males are temporary migrants. Though the husband's departures and returns, if he is a seasonal migrant, may change the timing of births, this does not seem to increase or decrease child-bearing. Migration might help modify knowledge, attitudes and practice towards contraception, but it might also promote higher fertility to compensate for separation. Migration has also been one of the causes of the spread of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and venereal diseases.

62. While male migration may not change traditional roles in rural society, it may be that female migration will have a longer-term impact not only on the migrants themselves, but also on the women who remain in the rural areas. The relative economic independence that accompanies migration provides an alternative model to that traditionally ascribed to rural women.

63. The migration of women to urban areas may serve to emancipate them from the patriarchal control of the family, particularly when women manage to find a job and become relatively economically independent. However, there is also evidence that women tend to send their income back to their families and thus remain financially dependent and under their control. Over the short run, this can provide a source of capital for rural development, although it also appears that rural-urban migration is typically one-way.

64. Education and the mass media intensify the process of urbanization in terms of cultural modernization, which undermines the traditional commitments to kin. The relocation of economic activity from the family to the market and increases in mobility and migration reduce parental leverage and, to a certain extent, destabilize the traditional division of labour.

65. The interrelations between rural-urban migration, seen in gender terms, as well as the rural economy and society, merit further study. The fact that these flows of people are tending to blur the distinction between rural and urban areas can be an important factor in designing both urban and rural development policies.

V. CONCLUSIONS

66. The evident importance of women as food producers in a rapidly urbanizing world suggests that strong priority should be given to implementing those actions found in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action designed to provide rural women with equal access to productive resources. In paragraph 58 (n), for example, the following action is called for:

> "Formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers (including subsistence farmers and producers, especially in rural areas) to financial, technical,

extension and marketing services; provide access to and control of land, appropriate infrastructure and technology in order to increase women's incomes and promote household food security, especially in rural areas and, where appropriate, encourage the development of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives." 18/

67. Linkages between urbanization/industrialization and agricultural/rural development are in many ways reflected in the changing status and roles of rural women. Rural women are an important link between rural and urban areas: they maintain food security and the general well-being of their households. A gender approach to socio-economic issues deserves to be addressed by, and incorporated in, regional development policies, plans, programmes and projects. Investment in rural women can make development programmes more productive. Since women produce a large proportion of food, it makes sense to improve their status and access to productive resources, capital, markets and information. Efforts should be made at all levels towards fostering rural and urban development. In view of the preparations for the forthcoming World Food Summit, to be held in November 1996, the role of women in food production and food security should receive greater prominence in the elaboration of the documents for that meeting.

68. The evident importance of gender issues in rural-urban migration and the close links between women's status in urban areas and in rural areas, suggest that gender aspects of the rural-urban continuum should be an important factor to be considered in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

69. The limited amount of information available on the economic contribution of rural women within the household, including in subsistence agriculture, suggests the need for greater efforts to document this phenomenon, including by implementing the action called for in chapter IV, section H, of the Platform for Action, as follows:

"Improving data collection on the unremunerated work which is already included in the United Nations System of National Accounts, such as in agriculture, particularly subsistence agriculture, and other types of non-market production activities." 19/

Notes

1/ See Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20), chap.I.

2/ Women in a Changing Global Economy: 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.IV.1).

3/ There are few global indicators of rural/urban migration. However, an estimate of the gender composition of migration can be seen from the ratio of women to men in urban and rural populations compared to the national average. If there are more men than the national average in urban areas, the migration has been primarily of males. If there are more women than the national average in urban areas, migration has been primarily of females.

4/ FAO Committee on World Food Security, Twentieth Session, Rome, 25-28 April 1995 (CFS: 95/4).

5/ Agriculture: Towards 2010 (Rome, FAO, 1993).

6/ Women in a Changing Global Economy ..., p. 35.

7/ Jodi L. Jacobson, Gender Bias: Roadblock to Sustainable Development, World Watch Paper No. 110 (September 1992).

8/ Marilyn Waring, If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics (New York, Harper and Row, 1988).

9/ A. K. Sen, "Gender and cooperative conflicts", in I. Tinker, ed., Persistent Inequalities: Women and World in Development (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 123-149.

10/ E. Kennedy and P. Peters, "Household food security and child nutrition: The interaction of income and gender of household head", World Development, vol. 20, No. 8, p. 1084.

11/ The State of World Rural Poverty (Rome, IFAD, 1992), p. 293.

12/ Melissa Leach, "Gender and the environment: traps and opportunities", Development in Practice, vol. 1, No. 2 (February 1992), p. 15.

13/ Internal Migration of Women in Developing Countries (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XIII.3).

14/ The Migration of Women: Methodological Issues in the Measurement and Analysis of Internal and International Migration (Santo Domingo, INSTRAW, 1994), p. 48.

15/ "Special problems of female heads of households in agriculture and rural development in Asia and the Pacific" (Bangkok, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1985) (E/ESCAP/AD.6/8).

16/ Migration and Urbanization: Interrelationship with Socio-economic Development and Evolving Policy Issues, Population Studies Series, No. 114 (1992) (ST/ESCAP/1133).

17/ M. d. L. A. Crummett, "The women's movement", Ceres-The FAO Review, No. 137 (1992).

18/ See Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I.

19/ Ibid.